

**Rhode Island Department of Education
and
Chariho Regional School District**

Face-To-Face Meeting Report and Agreement

April 10, 2002

Overview

A "Face-to-Face" meeting between the Chariho school district and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) occurred on April 10, 2002. The meeting was scheduled as a result of RIDE identifying two Chariho schools as "low performing," based on four years of student assessment data. The "Face-to-Face" meeting is the first step in the ongoing process of accountability for school improvement entitled Progressive Support and Intervention. It is designed to allow the school district to address its capacity to engage in the four core processes of school improvement: self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The meeting report is a public recitation of the steps to be taken in the district to increase student achievement in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics over the ensuing year.

Schools: Chariho High School and Chariho Career and Technical Center

Attending from Chariho: John Pini, Superintendent; Barry Ricci, Assistant Superintendent; Robert Mitchell, Principal, High School; Joseph Crowley, Director, Career and Technical Center; Joanne Malise, parent, HS School Improvement Team; Linda Lavoie, Chairperson, School Committee; Pamela Hawkins, Union President, Chariho NEA.

RIDE Staff: David V. Abbott, Interim Assistant Commissioner of Education; Kimberly R. Rothwell-Carson, Educational Specialist, Office of Special Needs and District Field Service Liaison; Robert Mason, Adult Education Program Specialist, Office of Research, High School Reform and Adult Education; Richard Latham, Grants Coordinator, Office of School Improvement and Accountability; Dr. Ellen Hedlund, Assessment Specialist, Office of Assessment; Lucille Andolfo, RIDE Fellow (IPlan), Office of Teacher Preparation, Certification, and Professional Development.

RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation

Interim Assistant Commissioner David V. Abbott welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting. Each meeting follows a similar format. The school district is asked to begin with a presentation on the status of school and district efforts to improve student achievement in English language arts (ELA) and

mathematics. School officials are also asked to comment on the impact of having been categorized as "low performing." RIDE staff then responds to the school district's presentation, and adds comments based upon data analyses performed prior to the meeting. District and school officials next describe future plans to add or modify action plans to improve teaching and learning, and identify existing or prospective barriers to implementation. The meeting is designed to conclude with shared expectations of the respective roles of the school, school district, and RIDE in supporting ongoing school improvement efforts. Commissioner Abbott further noted that the meeting would result in a report to be made public at an upcoming meeting of the Chariho Regional School Committee.

School District Presentation

Chariho representatives were given the opportunity to respond to the school performance category designation in their district, and asked to describe existing school improvement efforts. Mr. John Pini, Superintendent, began with a handout (see attached) which outlines the essence of what the district is doing and what it needs to do to address student performance at the high school. Mr. Pini stated that although the district and the school dislike being in the "low performing" category, the district knows that in some ways the category was earned and they must address the issues at hand. The new leadership team at the high school is a positive factor and has created many encouraging initiatives. In the past, Chariho has had a 92% turnover in administrative staff that has resulted in many interim personnel over the years. This new leadership team is dynamic and will achieve positive change.

The district acknowledged that the elementary schools are high performing and that the middle school is only moderating performing. The pattern of decreasing performance as students move from elementary to middle to secondary requires further investigation and analysis. Superintendent Pini noted that the initiatives in the district are not just about test results and that the high school's pride in and commitment to high achievement will ultimately result in school change.

Chariho Regional High School

Mr. Robert Mitchell, high school principal, spoke regarding Chariho Regional High School. Mr. Mitchell stated that he has been at the high school for almost two years and quickly realized the great responsibility and work that lay ahead. Although at times he feels overwhelmed, he is well supported by the school committee, the central office and the union, and is confident about the future. Being categorized as a low performing but improving school is a wake-up call for the high school. New assessment strategies have been added to supplement state initiatives so that school improvement is not just about "the test". Mr. Mitchell stated that he wants students to love learning by becoming life-long learners, critical thinkers, and problem solvers. Students are beginning to see that learning matters.

The curricula at the high school need improvement and some changes are already underway. Math has a standards-based approach and other areas are in the process of aligning their curricula to standards. There have been many new initiatives over the past year and one half. The newest initiative is the Freshman Academy that has yet to come before the school committee. It will be comprised of two freshman teams, heterogeneously grouped (with the exception of math), and divided into small learning communities. This initiative, based on information from SALT survey data and the SALT visit report, is a process that has generated much discussion.

David V. Abbott, RIDE Interim Assistant Commissioner of Education, asked how the 'bottom' would be raised. Mr. Mitchell responded that the mathematics credit requirement at the high school has been increased with all students needing to take algebra by grade 10. The PLATO software program has been added for academic support. This is a self-directed program, whereby teachers refer students in need of skill development or reinforcement. A certified mathematics teacher runs the PLATO lab. When Mr. Abbott asked about access to the program, Mr. Mitchell replied that due to the current traditional seven period day, students could access the lab during study period as well as before or after school. Mr. Abbott questioned geometry requirements. Dr. Ellen Hedlund, RIDE Assessment Specialist, offered that perhaps the mathematics curriculum could include "...all strands, every year." Mr. Ricci, Assistant Superintendent, replied, "One step at a time."

Additional changes in the school structure include a new attendance policy, guidance for home-school communication, and elimination of ASD, an in-school suspension model. Progress reports are being stressed and new policy statements such as "no student can fail without prior parent communication and what you earn is what you get for a grade" are being implemented. Another policy change is discontinuation of the practice of automatically placing students in a lower level section of a subject when they earn a quarterly grade of a "C" or below. Mr. Mitchell noted that the old practice "pushed students down," whereas now, students will be "pushed up." Mr. Mitchell is hopeful that this will address equity concerns.

Staff is participating in the Principles of Learning training and the high school is now participating in Learning Walks. Rubrics are more evident in the school. It is with these new initiatives that faculty has piloted a common direction. A Critical Friends group has been started. Mr. Mitchell supports block scheduling and is hopeful for its implementation at the high school. Another positive change is that the school committee is subsidizing summer school this year, which will greatly enhance program quality.

Mr. Pini noted that the community truly supports education. Community representatives at the table agreed. Resources are available but there is a need to fine-tune allocation and effectiveness. The union has been flexible, but scheduling meaningful, ongoing professional development remains a significant barrier. There are only two professional development days built into the calendar and staff attendance is optional. Professional development funds are used to pay staff to attend these days. Mr. Mitchell has been

able to use Article 31 monies to train faculty on the Principles of Learning. To support faculty, he has replaced a more traditional leadership structure with a creative leadership team, consisting of a special education department head, two deans and an assistant principal of teaching and learning.

The high school is participating in the Renaissance Project, which consists of a group of educators working with a facilitator to understand how to work with diverse learners. Mr. Abbott posed, "With all these initiatives, when is it too much?" Mr. Mitchell replied that the leadership is driving faculty to do a lot and may be pushing too much. "We need to focus on what we shared with you today and do them well." Those present agreed on the need to reflect on all the new initiatives and concentrate on doing them well.

Discussion turned to the faculty at the high school. Fifty-percent of the faculty is on the top salary step at the high school. At times, a low beginning salary scale makes it difficult to attract applicants. Mr. Pini stated that he has been able to attract people by offering them top-step, which has resulted in the hiring of some very competent new faculty. The union and the district are currently discussing the impact of the current salary structure as it pertains to the recruitment and retention of high quality staff.

Mr. Ricci explained the curriculum review process for the district. He commented that mathematics is an area that needs attention. Curriculum groups are meeting on ELA, among other subjects, and all new documents will be standards-based. K-12 articulation and involvement are being stressed in the district, but Mr. Ricci noted that transition issues are evident between 8th and 9th grade.

The building and facilities continue to be an issue as noted in the high school's NEASC report. Despite the fact that the bond issue to update and create new facilities has not yet passed, the district has made a series of incremental improvements to the physical plant. The uncertainty of Charlestown's continuation within the regional school district further complicates any and all discussions.

Chariho Area Career and Technical Center

Mr. Crowley, Director of the Chariho Career and Technical Center, spoke about issues related to the Center. He stressed that industry standards exams are administered, leading to industry-specific licensing or certification. State standards are currently being cross-walked to industry standards. Professional development is linked to the high school's professional development. Mr. Crowley did raise a concern that the Center will always be in the low performing category because the state assessment does not assess what is currently taught in a career and technical center. Mr. Abbott noted that the Perkins Act requires SEAs to disaggregate scores for students attending career and technical centers. Dr. Hedlund questioned whether student weaknesses in mathematics and ELA would negatively impact performance on the licensing exams. Mr. Crowley agreed that proficiencies in the three areas were interrelated.

RIDE Analysis

The inter-disciplinary team from RIDE made a series of observations based on its review of planning documents, assessment data, SALT survey results, SALT visit report, Office of Special Needs' School Support visit report, NEASC information, direct observation and discussion within this meeting:

- The school's profile for 1998-2001 shows the school is 'improving' in the areas of Mathematics and English language arts.
- All targets were met in Basic Reading and Reading Analysis and Interpretation, yet less than half (46%) of the students demonstrated proficiency in reading for basic understanding.
- Four of the six targets were met in Writing. Writing Conventions showed the strongest performance.
- Targets were met in all three Mathematics subtests. Scores have improved over the three year period, with the number of high performing students increasing and the number of low performing students decreasing.
- District and school improvement planning appears weak.
- Classroom practice is moving towards standards-based instruction, but it is not reflected in curriculum at this time.
- Continue work with the "Principles of Learning" initiative.
- Consider reading support for all high school students.
- Examine the business/math curriculum to assure that it is standards-based.
- Examine the ways district professional development supports and/or interfaces with building professional development and Article 31 monies.

RIDE/District Agreement

Mr. Abbott commended the Chariho school district for a professional and well-reasoned presentation that represented the infrastructure of the district and the collective vision of all. RIDE endorses the approaches that the Chariho school district is taking to improve performance outcomes for all students and further commends the high school for improving student performance in both ELA and mathematics. The Department of Education and the school district further agreed on the need to prioritize among the large number of school improvement activities, with particular emphasis on the following initiatives:

- Continue recent emphasis on developing parent involvement through the School Improvement Team;
- Support further development of the integration of school and district strategic planning and professional development with RIDE support;
- Continue efforts to upgrade conditions of the physical plant;
- Continue comprehensive curriculum reform efforts, especially in mathematics;
- Increase focus on reading for understanding across disciplines; and,
- Remove barriers to recruitment of highly qualified faculty.